

Starting Stronger: 5 Ways to Improve Educator Evaluation in 2014-15

Background

Throughout the first year of statewide implementation of AchieveNJ, the Office of Evaluation worked with the [AchieveNJ Advisory Committee \(ANJAC\)](#) and other stakeholder groups to hear feedback and gather lessons and advice. In an ongoing effort to learn from that feedback and provide support, the Department has condensed these lessons into 5 key themes, each with straightforward strategies to help school districts better focus their efforts in 2014-15.

1. Include Educators in Two-Way Dialogue

Most districts are currently in the process of improving policies and procedures for the second year of implementation. As districts do this work, teachers and school leaders must be included in these reflective conversations and must work together to make changes. Many districts that have been successful in implementing high-quality evaluation systems emphasize the importance of open channels of communication and feedback. Even if a district has not yet had an opportunity to solicit educator input in a substantial way, doing so as soon as possible can increase the likelihood of successful implementation. The Department recommends that districts take advantage of the structures in place to promote this type of communication:

- **District Evaluation Advisory Committee (DEAC):** Utilize DEAC members to discuss and make recommendations on significant evaluation policy decisions. This practice has proven to be a valuable process for districts to gather and incorporate educator input.
- **School Improvement Panel (SciP):** As early as possible in the school year, solicit SciP feedback on any recommended policy changes and help share information with staff in advance of the **October 1 notification deadline for evaluation policies**. This [SciP Guidance](#) outlines the requirements for this committee and provides examples from educators to inform its activities.

2. Create More Efficient and Effective Observation and Conferencing Processes

Educators report that the increased number – and more focused nature – of observations and professional conversations is one of the most rewarding outcomes of AchieveNJ. One teacher noted, "Over time... the conversation changed from 'Did you get your observation yet?' to 'Does anyone have any suggestions for how I can move from *developing* in this area to *applying*?' And 'What does "innovative" look like?!'" In turn, leaders also report that this shift is time-consuming. Districts can make adjustments to help build on the benefits and cut out inefficient procedures through three specific activities:

- **Observation instrument adjustment and re-alignment:** Work with educators to identify components and elements that have yielded the most and least valuable information to determine how each should be weighted and scored. Some districts have identified "power" components that must be scored in every observation. Some districts have placed considerably less emphasis on some components or elements to better focus on those that provide the most essential information for improving teacher practice.
- **Re-examining observation procedures:** Particularly for those non-observable domains of the rubric (aka the "off-stage" domains), consider how evidence is being collected and when that evidence is being scored. Taking time to develop explicit procedures for gathering and assessing data on such elements (i.e., planning and professional responsibilities) will make the work more efficient throughout the year.
- **Preparing for and streamlining processes:** In addition to revisiting performance management software or data processes, consider opportunities to eliminate unnecessary procedures. For example, the Department has proposed allowing for electronic pre-conferences in some cases (see the [April 2014 Update](#), Section IIIA).

3. Recalibrate Targets and Improve Assessments for Student Growth Objectives (SGOs)

In response to educator feedback, the Department released the updated [2014-15 SGO Guidebook](#), [SGO 2.0 presentation](#), and several other [resources](#). These materials can help teachers develop higher-quality assessments and set appropriate targets for all students based on a variety of sources informing student starting points. Using these resources independently or in conjunction with state-led [training workshops](#) can help teachers improve SGO quality through each of the following:

- **Setting ambitious but achievable targets:** Setting higher-quality learning targets begins with collecting better and more informative baseline data. Teachers find that using multiple pieces of evidence about student baseline knowledge allows them to set more realistic goals. By setting differentiated starting points, teachers can identify student needs and think more critically about how to monitor student learning throughout the year.
- **Improving district assessments:** Many districts have identified finding or creating high-quality SGO assessments as a key challenge. Current assessments may be too broad or too narrow, may not incorporate appropriate rigor, or may simply not be standard enough across classrooms to yield meaningful information. In other cases, schools may have the right assessments in place, but might not have the proper testing protocols to ensure objective results. While complex, this is work that cuts across all departments of most school districts and, if done right, can elevate the level of student learning in every classroom. See the most updated SGO [training presentation](#) for strategies on how to begin this work.

4. Improve Training and Connect Professional Learning Opportunities to Data

While all districts are required to complete evaluation-related training every year, many teachers have reported a desire to go deeper into certain aspects of a district's rubric. During the second year of AchieveNJ implementation, districts can focus on two elements:

- **Providing Deeper Training:** Once all parts of the system have been covered, use in-school training, PLCs, or professional learning days to focus on individual components that have the greatest impact on student learning or are the most complex or nuanced.
- **Tailoring Needs:** Examine data on the pedagogical areas where teachers struggle the most to inform professional learning activities. The Department used early data from districts in 2013-14 to identify discussion, questioning, and student engagement as areas to focus [statewide training](#). Build on this effort by sharing the information and/or identifying other areas of need.

5. Use Outcomes from 2013-14 to Set Clear Expectations for Educators

Examining all of the data gathered in the first year of AchieveNJ implementation can help districts identify trends and set priorities. In particular, administrators have noted two major themes from 2013-14 that others can consider going forward:

- **Re-calibrating evaluators:** Examine observation and SGO data to identify inconsistent scoring practices among evaluators and inform observer calibration activities. This data may also help identify those observers who need more focused training or professional development.
- **Setting goals for improvement and corrective action:** Ensure that educators have a clear and concrete understanding of how they might improve during the school year. This applies to all educators, but becomes particularly essential for those who have received Partially Effective or Ineffective ratings. District leaders must ensure these educators are on [Corrective Action Plans](#) and must help them to set clear goals and expectations to improve their practice.

For More Information

- Visit the AchieveNJ website at www.nj.gov/education/AchieveNJ, e-mail educatorevaluation@doe.state.nj.us; or call the AchieveNJ Help Line at 609-777-3788.